

Radicalization: Myth and Reality



Abu Hamza al-Masri, former imam of Finsbury Park Mosque in north London, was convicted in February 2006 on eleven charges including solicitation to murder and “stirring up racial hatred.”

MYTH: Poverty is the primary breeding ground for terrorists.

REALITY: Many terrorists come from middle-class backgrounds and have university-level educations, particularly in the technical sciences and engineering. No statistical relationship exists between poverty and becoming a terrorist.

MYTH: US foreign policy is the primary cause of radicalization.

REALITY: The grievances that fuel radicalization are diverse and vary across locations and groups. Radicalization frequently is driven by personal concerns at the local level in addition to frustration with international events.

MYTH: There are visible “signs” of radicalization.

REALITY: Changes in appearance during different stages of radicalization often are the same changes seen in individuals who are not being radicalized, making it difficult to identify visible markers.